

programs for the handicapped

October 24, 1969

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Remarks

by

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Assistant Secretary for Community and Field Services

U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

at

Annual Conference

Youth National Association for Retarded Children

Miami Beach, Florida

October 9, 1969

NEW DIRECTIONS

President Nixon has made a statement commending the work of associations for retarded children. I would like to read it to you because it can serve the youth membership of NARC as an inspiration and as an action agenda for the years immediately ahead. The statement is as follows:

"The willingness to help others has always been part of the American way of life. And one of the finest examples of this is reflected in our nation's associations of parents and friends of the mentally retarded. These groups of concerned, caring citizens have over the past two decades brought the needs of the mentally retarded out of the limbo of ignorance and neglect and made them the focus of community, state and national government programs.

"With the nation more awake than ever to the realization that the retarded can grow, learn and contribute fully to society, I want to commend your attention to the remaining challenges we face.

"We must design new cooperative programs to help the retarded child who has other handicaps as well.

"We must develop economically feasible programs for the retarded in our rural areas.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Secretary's Committee on Mental Retardation

Patricia Reilly Hitt, Assistant Secretary for Community and Field Services

Washington, D.C. 20201

"We must increase our vocational training and community living projects to help each retarded individual grow to the fullest use of his abilities.

"We must redouble our dedication to advancing the concept of the retarded person as an individual with personal feelings, with aspirations and with potential to contribute to national life.

"And finally, we must encourage state laws and civil procedures that recognize what we have learned about the abilities and needs of the retarded.

"The President's Committee on Mental Retardation considers these areas critical for joint government-voluntary action at every level in the coming years.

"We believe that success in these areas will confirm the new hope for the retarded that is promised by an ever-growing public interest and concern for their well-being.

"But federal efforts would be empty without the hard work and generous support of groups like yours. So we look with confidence and anticipation to the continuing inspiration and achievement that will come from within your ranks as together we make great strides in the 1970's to overcome the problem of mental retardation in our midst."

This is President Nixon's message to those working for the retarded everywhere in the nation. It demonstrates once again that the retarded, and your efforts in their behalf, are cared about in the highest offices in our land. I hope you will take this knowledge home with you and keep it in the forefront of your thinking as you carry out your work with the retarded. It is the clearest possible expression of the President's deep and personal concern that each handicapped person enjoy full opportunity to accomplish every achievement that his ability allows.

Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Robert Finch, who serves as Chairman of the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, shares the President's view. He has taken a deep interest in the needs and accomplishments of the retarded since he came to Washington last January. Many of you may have seen him at the close of "Teacher, Teacher" last February, when he commended Bill Schulman and David McCallum and Ossie Davis for the beauty and the great message of that show. Bob Finch is a deeply caring and sensitive man. He is proving himself a good friend of the retarded in their need to become recognized, valued citizens who are helping society live and work.

In this direction, he has taken steps to bring the ideas of young people like yourselves into the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The Department now has, for example, a very active Deputy Assistant Secretary for Youth Affairs, Stanley Thomas. He is a part of my staff, and I want you to be sure to make your thoughts and views--on any subject of interest to you--known to him. It is critically important to us in H.E.W. to have those thoughts and views. We are the Department charged by Congress and the President to administer the largest single package of Federal programs having direct meaning to the families of individual Americans. And young people make up the largest single group of Americans. Not very long from now they will represent half of the country's people. Economically, young people already are a multi-billion dollar stake in the nation's life. ^: ,

What we do in H.E.W. through our health programs, our education activities, our family assistance measures, our consumer protection and education programs touch you at many points--in school, in the state of your community's health, in the quality and cost of what you buy, in the kinds of programs available to the retarded people with whom you volunteer. We want to know you and to have the benefit of your insights. I think of your generation as the caring generation. Young men and women today, it seems to me, care more meaningfully about the shape and direction of our lives as individuals as Americans and as members of the human community than they ever have before. This is not to say that I believe all the actions of young citizens are constructive. Some of their choices have disturbed me greatly. But far and away the vast majority of our young people are demonstrating the quality of caring in ways which give the nation reason to rejoice. This characteristic can provide your generation with the capacity for world-shaping and it makes you one of the most significant generations America has produced. You have already learned to move beyond personal concerns to involve yourselves deeply in the needs of others. One of your most important contributions is in helping retarded people grow and learn and find dignity, and you do this out of the knowledge that human beings can and must be of service to each other if society is to advance.

Your caring and commitment come at a time when work with the retarded is taking on more meaning and significance than ever before. We have now left far behind the old notion that little could be done for the retarded beyond the provision of basic care. We are now learning that every individual, even the most profoundly retarded, can grow, can accomplish more. We are discovering that while the retarded are limited in some ways, we really don't know where the boundaries of limitation are. Finally--and I think this may be one of the most important developments in our national attention to mental retardation--we are beginning to understand the relationship of mental retardation to the great study of human development. This means that retardation can no longer be thought of in a vacuum, „. ., without relevance to other facts and problems in human development.

What does this mean to you as volunteers who work with the retarded and to those who may be thinking of careers in service to the retarded? Basically, it means that your work is at the middle of action having a lot of significance for a lot of people.

For example, more and more now educators are paying attention to what is going on in classes for handicapped children. In those classes, more than anywhere else, we are finding the answers to child learning problems. We are learning, there, how people learn.

Another example comes from the world of work. Before you can hire a retarded worker, the job must be analyzed, broken down into its various steps and the worker taught those steps. This seems like a simple and a sensible thing to do, but interestingly enough, before counselors of handicapped people undertook such analysis little was known about what many jobs consist of or what we do when we work.

Related to this is the whole picture of manpower in programs for the retarded. If you make a career of working with the handicapped, you may eventually become part of a profession that hardly exists now. Already, hard looks are being taken at what doctors, nurses, teachers, therapists, psychologists, aides, attendants and volunteers in work for the handicapped are doing, could do and should be doing to make the best use of available skills. Professional roles are being taken apart and put back together in new ways.

Still another example of the importance of work with the retarded and other handicapped people is the part to be played in the search for causes of human development errors. Relentlessly pursuing this question, researchers have now found that some retardation can be predicted from human chromosome patterns. In areas of prenatal development we have picked up some interesting clues. Perhaps you read recently of the two Pennsylvania doctors who reported tooth malformations which, when studied, may suggest the point in prenatal life at which something went wrong and retardation resulted. Such discoveries tantalize and prod us on.

Finally, we know now that we can no longer separate the mentally retarded from the rest of society. As you continue your work with the retarded, this fact will come to have enormous meaning both for you and those with whom you come into contact. It means that soon the retarded will no longer be sent to separate rooms and separate institutions and separate schools. Increasingly, they are beginning to go to school with all other children, sharing some activities with all other children while also having some special activities to meet their special needs. Bringing the retarded closer to the rest of society will also mean that their health and medical needs will be met in ways more similar to that of everyone else--by doctors, nurses, clinics and centers whose job is to help everyone stay well or get well again.

It is desirable that all of these people receive training in the special problems of treating the handicapped. Dentists will need to know how to handle the special dental needs of the severely retarded, for example. It should not be necessary to seek over an entire state to locate a dentist able to treat these problems.

In short, fundamental changes, are in the works for the field of mental retardation. They will result in more knowledge about retardation, more expertise in dealing with the needs of the retarded, and less of the fragmentation that now results in the retarded getting a lot of attention in some communities and none in others, that assures a retarded child good service in some centers, a mentally ill child good service in other centers, a cerebral palsied child good service in still a third, but none of them equally good service everywhere.

These are problems that I strongly urge you to do something about. Your love for the retarded child must seek the greater good of all handicapped children as the one sure way of guaranteeing that the retarded child receives the services he needs to grow to his full potential.

By giving of yourself in the work of building better services for the handicapped, you are in a very real way giving life. There is no greater service, no greater vocation, no greater life purpose. I join with President Nixon in congratulating you on the work you are doing, and on the importance of your commitment to what the President called in his inaugural address "The Small, Splendid Efforts" through which we can build a great cathedral of the spirit--each of us raising it one stone at a time, as he reaches out to his neighbor, helping, caring, and doing. I salute you with great respect and with gratitude because you are focusing your vitality, your energy, your social consciousness, and your idealism on the helping and serving of others.

You have great and wonderful adventures ahead...and lots and lots of hard work that will bring you rewards of love, know-how and insight into the deepest meanings of life. I look forward to hearing of the triumphs I know are going to be yours in volunteer service during the coming years. Here's good luck to you, from a gratified nation.